



Disaster and Emergency Management Resources

Flood and Flash Flood Disaster Management Measures

Before a Flood or Flash Flood

- Determine what your flood risk is. Your community officials or county emergency services office can help you determine the history of flooding in your region and whether your property is in the floodplain.
- If you live in an area that is prone to flooding, you can take a number of measures to help protect your home and family before a flood.
 - Floodproof your home. (See Section 3.6)
 - Develop a Family Emergency Plan .(See Section 2.2)
 - Develop a Family Disaster Kit. (See Sections 2.3 – 2.4)
 - Closely monitor weather forecasts for flood watches and warnings
 - Stockpile emergency building materials, including plywood, plastic sheeting, lumber, nails, hammer and saw, pry bar, shovels, and sandbags.
 - Have check valves installed in building sewer traps to prevent flood waters from backing up in sewer drains or use stoppers to plug showers, tubs, or basins.
 - Purchase Flood Insurance. (See Section 15.1)
- What to do if a flood watch or warning is issued:
 - Listen continuously to a NOAA Weather Radio or a portable, battery-powered radio (or television) for updated emergency information.
 - Be ready to react immediately. Floods and flash floods can happen quickly and without warning.
 - If your residence is in a flood-prone area:
 - ❑ Fill bathtubs, sinks, and plastic bottles with clean water.
 - ❑ Bring patio furniture and other outdoor items indoors.
 - ❑ Move your furniture and valuables to higher floors of your home.
 - ❑ If you are instructed by local authorities, turn off all utilities at the main power switch and close the main gas valve.
 - ❑ Get your disaster supplies ready.
 - ❑ Fill your car's gas tank in case an evacuation notice is issued.
 - ❑ Be prepared to evacuate.

Safety Precautions During a Flood Event

- When driving during a flood event:
 - Because most flood-related deaths occur when people are driving, avoid all non-essential travel.
 - If you must drive, avoid areas that are subject to flooding.
 - Never attempt to drive over a flooded road. The depth of water is not always obvious and the roadbed may be washed out.
 - If your car stalls, abandon it immediately and climb to higher ground.
 - Be especially cautious at night when it is harder to recognize flood dangers.

- When outside during a flood event:
 - Avoid walking through flooded areas – particularly during a flash flood. As little as 6 inches of moving water can knock you off your feet. Also, the water may be contaminated with oil, gasoline, or raw sewage.
 - Never let children play outside during a flood event.
 - Closely watch out for downed power lines and electrical wires. Electrocuting is another major cause of deaths in floods because electrical current passes easily through water. Report downed lines to the utility company immediately.
 - Watch out for snakes and other animals.
 - Be especially cautious at night when it is harder to recognize flood dangers.

- When inside your home during a flood event:
 - If the waters start to rise inside your house before you have evacuated, retreat to the second floor, the attic, and, if necessary, the roof.
 - Don't use matches, cigarette lighters, or any other open flames since gas may be trapped inside. Instead, use a flashlight to light your way.
 - Look for fire hazards.
 - Keep power off until an electrician has inspected your system for safety.
 - Be careful walking around. After a flood, steps and floors are often slippery with mud and covered with debris, including nails and broken glass.

What to Do After a Flood or Flash Flood

- If indicated, seek necessary medical care at the nearest hospital or clinic. Contaminated flood waters can lead to very serious infections.
- Help a neighbor who may require special assistance.
- Avoid disaster areas. Your presence might hamper rescue and other emergency operations, and put you at further risk.
- Continue to listen to NOAA Weather Radio or local radio or television stations and return home only when authorities indicate it is safe to do so.
- Stay out of any building if floodwaters remain around the building. Floodwaters often undermine foundations, causing sinking. Floors can crack or break, and buildings can collapse.
- Avoid entering ANY building (home, business, or other) before local officials have said it is safe to do so. Buildings may have hidden damage that makes them unsafe. Gas leaks or electric or water line damage can create additional problems.
- Report broken utility lines to the appropriate authorities. Reporting potential hazards will get the utilities turned off as quickly as possible, preventing further hazard and injury.
- Avoid smoking inside buildings. Smoking in confined areas can cause fires.
- When entering buildings, use extreme caution. Building damage may have occurred where you least expect it. Watch carefully every step you take.
 - Wear sturdy shoes. The most common injury following a disaster is cut feet.
 - Use battery-powered lanterns or flashlights when examining buildings. Battery-powered lighting is the safest and easiest, preventing fire hazard for the user, occupants, and building.
 - Examine walls, floors, doors, staircases, and windows to make sure that the building is not in danger of collapsing.

- Inspect foundations for cracks or other damage. Cracks and damage to a foundation can render a building uninhabitable.
- Look for fire hazards. There may be broken or leaking gas lines, flooded electrical circuits, or submerged furnaces or electrical appliances. Flammable or explosive materials may travel from upstream. Fire is the most frequent hazard following floods.
- Check for gas leaks. If you smell gas or hear a blowing or hissing noise, open a window and quickly leave the building. Turn off the gas at the outside main valve if you can and call the gas company from a neighbor's home. If you turn off the gas for any reason, it must be turned back on by a professional.
- Look for electrical system damage. If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if you smell burning insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. If you have to step in water to get to the fuse box or circuit breaker, call an electrician first for advice. Electrical equipment should be checked and dried before being returned to service.
- Check for sewage and waterline damage. If you suspect sewage lines are damaged, avoid using the toilets and call a plumber. If water pipes are damaged, contact the water company and avoid using water from the tap. You can obtain safe water from undamaged water heaters or by melting ice cubes.
- Watch out for animals, especially poisonous snakes that may have come into buildings with the flood waters. Use a stick to poke through debris. Flood waters flush snakes and many animals out of their homes.
- Watch for loose plaster, drywall, and ceilings that could fall.
- Take pictures of the damage, both of the building and its contents, for insurance claims.

- Throw away food that has come in contact with floodwaters. Some canned foods may be salvageable. If the cans are dented or damaged, throw them away. Food contaminated by floodwaters can cause severe infections.
- If water is of questionable purity, boil or add bleach, and distill drinking water before using. Wells inundated by floodwaters should be pumped out and the water tested for purity before drinking. If in doubt, call your local public health authority. Ill health effects often occur when people drink water contaminated with bacteria and other germs.
- Service damaged septic tanks, cesspools, pits, and leaching systems as soon as possible. Damaged sewage systems are health hazards.
- If you receive a puncture wound or a wound contaminated with feces, soil, or saliva, have a doctor or health department professional determine whether a tetanus booster is necessary.

Additional information on cleaning-up your flood-damaged home can be found in the Home Recovery Section of the Manual

Additional information on repairing your flood-damaged home can be found in a FEMA publication entitled “*Repairing Your Flooded Home*”. A free copy of this 60- page book can be obtained from your local chapter of the American Red Cross or from:

FEMA Publications
P.O. Box 70274
Washington, DC, 20024

Adapted from resource material developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service entitled “Louisiana Floods,” and the Texas Cooperative Extension Service entitled “The Handbook for Emergency Preparation and Response”